

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SD BRIDGE TO BE DEDICATED FOR SFC RICHARD SCHILD

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a State Bridge Dedication Ceremony to honor Combat Veteran SFC Richard Schild.

The ceremony will be held Saturday, September 12, 2020, at 10:00 am (CT) in front of the Yankton County Court House at 321 W. Third Street in Yankton.

The west bound Jim River Bridge on HWY 50 will be dedicated to SFC Richard Schild, of Yankton, who died in combat on December 4, 2005, following a detonation of a

roadside bomb in Baghdad. Schild was serving with Battery C, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery unit based out of Yankton.

Naming bridges in honor of our combat veterans who died while serving their country is a new initiative of Governor Kristi Noem and the South Dakota Departments of Military, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs.

"Whenever and wherever this nation has called, in times of darkness and danger, as well as in times of peace and prosperity, veterans have been there and have proudly carried the torch of liberty for all to see." said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Our fallen heroes are no longer with us, but their memory lives on in the hearts of their loved ones and our state," said Whitlock. "Naming our South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen will give us an opportunity of remembrance, reflection, and respect—for honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life."

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SDVSOA SELECTS LEADERSHIP

During their business meeting last week, the South Dakota Veterans Service Officers Association (SDVSOA) selected their officers and district representatives.

Aaron Walberg, from Brown County, was elected president and Doug Huntrods, from Meade County, was elected vice president. District representatives selected this year were Courtney VanZanten (Lake County) for District I and Craig Bennett (Davison County) for District III.

The primary purpose of the SDVSOA is to promote and further the work of all Tribal and County Veterans Service Officers in the State of South Dakota and to ensure that all veterans and/or their families are reached and receive the care and benefits to which they are entitled. Current board members are as follows:

Board Members	Name	Office Phone
President	Aaron Walberg (Brown County)	605.626.7129
Secretary/Treasurer	Fred Kuil (Douglas County)	605.724.2750
Vice President	Doug Huntrods (Meade County)	605.347.7623
Judge Advocate	Dennis Evenson (Deuel County)	605.874.2111
District I Representative	Courtney VanZanten (Lake County)	605.256.7612
District II Representative	Ron Hoffer (Edmunds County)	605.287.4629
District III Representative	Craig Bennett (Davison County)	605.995.8619
District IV Representative	Jesse Ketzer (Lawrence County)	605.578.9748
District V Representative	Geri Opsal (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate)	605.698.3388

VETERANS HONOR BANNERS

The Rapid City Veterans Honor Banner Project will begin hanging 180 banners honoring veterans, from the Civil War to the present conflict, on streets in downtown Rapid City on September 8.

This year they will pay special tribute, with a small ceremony, to Lakota Code Talker Garfield Brown. His banner will be put up on Main Street between 6th & 7th Streets.

Visit <u>veteranshonorbannerproject.com</u> to learn more about the program and to view the banners.

MADSEN JOINS SDDVA TEAM

John Madsen, Milbank, has joined the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs team. Madsen will serve as a field officer for the northeastern corner of South Dakota.

John and his wife Britanni have three children and live in Milbank.

His first day on the job was August 17th and his second week afforded him a chance to meet all of the SDDVA benefits team and the county and tribal veterans service officers at the annual SDDVE Benefit School.

"I find it's a very interesting career with many new and wonderful people," said Madsen. "I couldn't ask for a better place to call my work home."



REISCH SELECTED AS MINER COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER

Miner County Commissioners have selected Tim Reisch as their new County Veterans Service Officer. Reisch replaces Terry Lee who had served in that position since 2000.

Reisch's office will be located at 409 E. HWY 34 in Howard and he can be reached at 605-579-0349. His office hours will be from 8:00—12:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

When not helping veterans, you'll find Reisch enjoying family, farming and collecting farm equipment!

The SDDVA team is looking forward to having Tim's expertise, commitment and dedication working with and for our veterans.



VA ANNOUNCES NEW CLINICAL TRIAL FOR VETERANS WITH COVID-19

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a new clinical trial to study convalescent plasma for treating seriously ill COVID-19 patients as part of a larger effort to give veterans faster access to potential COVID-19 treatments and test the treatments' effectiveness.

The trial is the first of multiple studies in VA Coronavirus Research and Efficacy Studies (VA CURES), a master protocol that offers a standardized framework for studying potential treatments for COVID-19 without the need for a new study design and protocol each time.

"This trial will go a long way toward helping in the fight against COVID-19," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "VA CURES will provide valuable information that will benefit our veterans who are battling COVID-19, as well as other patients and the medical community in general."

The trial will enroll around 700 veterans with COVID-19 who are hospitalized at VA medical centers. A study team will randomize the study volunteers to receive either convalescent plasma or a saline placebo, and track and assess recovery and effects of the treatment.

Convalescent plasma is donated by people who have recovered from COVID-19 and have antibodies against the virus in their blood. Antibodies are proteins the body makes to fight infections.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) previously authorized the use of convalescent plasma as an investigational treatment for COVID-19 through FDA's expanded access program. The program, used widely throughout the nation, including at many VA sites, ended Aug. 28. FDA has since authorized the emergency use of the therapy based on the available scientific evidence to date. FDA stresses further evidence from rigorous trials — such as the new VA study — is "critically important" for establishing safety and efficacy.

Visit VA COVID-19 research for more information.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Weekly Report: August 25-31, 2020

"Americans are coming together to fight COVID-19 in ways they haven't joined together since World War II, and VA is providing vital services to both Veterans and non-Veterans as part of this fight."

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie



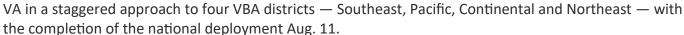
VA OFFERS ELECTRONIC VIRTUAL ASSISTANT FOR VETERANS TO CONNECT FASTER WITH COUNSELORS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a new artificial intelligence platform designed to enhance customer service and provide timely responses to veterans.

The electronic Virtual Assistant (e-VA) allows veterans to receive a timely response to basic questions, automated alerts, follow-up messages, appointment reminders and the ability to schedule and reschedule appointments.

"For our veterans, e-VA means communicating with more flexibility and convenience and the ability to connect with our counselors and staff via text and email," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "For VA, e-VA connects with our veterans, efficiently handles administrative functions, works with our case management system, and also provides management with additional reporting tools."





The platform provides modern, streamlined and responsive customer service support to VR&E veterans, as well as automates routine administrative activities for VR&E Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and staff.

Participants will be allowed to submit documentation from a smartphone, tablet, or computer. Additionally, all correspondence through e-VA will be included in the veteran's electronic file.

Veterans receiving VR&E services will receive a text message or an email introducing e-VA as VR&E's new electronic Virtual Assistant. Veterans must opt-in to start using the service. Upon opt-in acceptance e-VA will be available immediately.



DSS AWARDED \$1.2 MILLION TO HELP PREVENT ADULT SUICIDE

More than 68,000 South Dakotans are expected to be helped over the next three years in the fight against adult suicide, thanks to a \$1.2 million federal grant recently awarded to South Dakota's Department of Social Services (DSS). The money is intended to help prevent suicide in the 25 and older age group.

"We are continually working on multiple fronts to save South Dakota lives by preventing suicide," said DSS Cabinet Secretary Laurie Gill. "Every life counts. And we are doing everything we can to help provide the resources needed to give people the help they need. This money will help us reach tens of thousands of people."

The grant funds will be used to achieve three main goals:

- Improve follow up care for adults, identified as being at risk for suicide after leaving inpatient behavioral health units.
- Increase the number of health care organizations that adopt "Zero Suicide" practices, which is the fundamental belief that suicide is preventable, with a goal of reaching zero suicides.
- Additional focus on veterans not already receiving Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Services, by increasingly engaging with and training veterans' groups, community organizations, and employers to recognize warning signs; and awareness of available resources for veterans and their families.

During the three-year life of the grant, the state will receive \$400,000 annually from August 31, 2020, through August 30, 2023. DSS is one of only five applicants in the nation to receive the grant.

"The increased training, identification, and care of at risk adults will save lives. These adults could be parents, grandparents, friends, or neighbors," says Gill. "We cannot put a price on saving lives. This grant money will help prevent not only suicide, but the heartache of loved ones left behind."



The DSS Division of Behavioral Health will lead the project in collaboration with the Helpline Center, health care providers, and other community partners.

In 2019, Governor Kristi Noem tasked state agencies to develop a statewide suicide prevention strategic plan. Together, the Departments of Health, Social Services, Education, Tribal Relations, Agriculture, and Veterans Affairs, as well as the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Health Board developed South Dakota's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.

To find help in your area, visit <u>dss.sd.gov</u> and click on the Behavioral Health tab or go to <u>www.sdsuicideprevention.org</u>.

DOD ANNOUNCES 2020 RECIPIENTS OF SECRETARY OF DEFENSE EMPLOYER SUPPORT FREEDOM AWARD

The Department of Defense is pleased to announce the 15 recipients of the 2020 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, the highest U.S. government honor to employers for support of National Guard and Reserve employees.

"I am proud to recognize these 15 outstanding civilian employers," said Defense Secretary Dr. Mark T. Esper. "The citizen warriors of the National Guard and Reserve have evolved from a strategic reserve to become an integral component of the operational force. Having employers who support their military service is critical to their success and the success of our National Defense Strategy. We salute these exemplary employers for their steadfast commitment to their Guard and Reserve employees, their patriotism, and their contributions to the defense and security of our great Nation."

The 2020 Freedom Award recipients will be recognized at the state level by Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve State Chairs. Nominated by the South Dakota Army National Guard, Sanford Health was the only recipient in South Dakota recognized.

The 2020 recipients were selected from 2,623 nominations received from Guardsmen and Reservists highlighting how their civilian employers went far beyond what the federal law requires to support them.

The Freedom Award began in 1996 under the auspices of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve to recognize exceptional employer support, with 295 honorees to date.

For more information about the Freedom Award, visit www.FreedomAward.mil. To learn more about ESGR, a program of the Defense Personnel and Family Support Center, visit www.ESGR.mil.

ESGR is a Department of Defense program that develops and promotes supportive work environments for Service members in the Reserve Components through outreach, recognition, and educational opportunities that increase awareness of applicable laws. It also provides assistance in resolving conflicts between Service members and their employers.



FORBES RANKS VA AS ONE OF THE BEST EMPLOYERS IN 17 STATES

Forbes has named the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) one of America's best employers in 17 states in its second annual survey of America's best employers by state.

According to the survey, the VA is a top-ranked employer in 17 states: Arizona, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa,

Kentucky, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and West Virginia.

AMERICA'S BEST EMPLOYERS

The VA was ranked as a top 10 employer in five of those states: Iowa, Kentucky, Montana, Rhode Island, and South Dakota.

"These survey results are the latest proof that we are turning this department around," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Listening to our employees helps us deliver better customer service to veterans, but it also makes for happier, more motivated staff members."

Forbes' findings underscore similar ones over the last two years from the Partnership for Public Service that show the VA has boosted its rating from 17th to 6th among large federal agencies in its annual "best places to work" survey of federal employees.

SDDVA EXPANDS CLEAN ENERGY FOOTPRINT

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will expand their clean energy footprint by activating a 372.2Kw solar panel at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home in Hot Springs on Wednesday, September 9, at 11:00 am (MT).

The ceremony will be held at the Flagpole Pavilion at the State Veterans Home (2500 E. Minnekahta Avenue) in Hot Springs.

Power generated by the solar system should provide half of the electrical load for the campus.



DURING SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH, VA ENCOURAGES SUPPORTERS TO BE THERE FOR VETERANS

This September, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognizes Suicide Prevention Month high-lighting the VA's <u>Be There</u> campaign, reminding veterans and their loved ones that small actions can make a big difference to veterans going through difficult times.



During this and every month, *Be There* wants veterans, community leaders, and veterans' families and friends to know there is no special training needed to give a veteran hope.

"There are simple ways anyone can show support for our nation's veterans like learning about <u>VA's suicide prevention</u> efforts and recognizing the <u>signs</u> that a veteran may need help," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Take a moment to listen with compassion and let veterans know you're there for them."

Be There suggests several simple actions that can help make a difference for a veteran to include:

- Reaching out to veterans by sending a check-in text, cooking them dinner, or simply asking them how they're doing.
- Learning about the warning signs of suicide found on the Veterans Crisis Line website.
- Watching the free <u>S.A.V.E. training video</u> to learn how to respond with care and compassion if someone indicates they are having thoughts of suicide.
- Contacting VA's <u>Coaching Into Care</u> program where a licensed psychologist or social worker will provide loved ones with guidance for motivating veterans to seek support.
- Sharing stories of hope and recovery from VA's <u>Make the</u> Connection.

For more information and resources vis-

it BeThereForVeterans.com.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, con-

tact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call (1-800-273-8255)and Press 1, text to 838255 or chat online at "VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat".



HURON NAMED PURPLE HEART CITY

Huron Mayor Gary Harrington opened the Huron City Commission meeting by reading into record a proclamation designating Huron as a Purple Heart City.

This designation serves the purpose of honoring military personnel wounded or killed in combat.

The purple heart was first created by General George Washington in 1782, and it is the nation's oldest military medal.

Military Order of the Purple Heart State President Ken Teunissen attended the meeting and presented the signs to the Commission.



VBA TELE-TOWN HALL FOR SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS

Dr. Paul Lawrence will be conducting a Tele-Townhall with South Dakota Veterans on September 10th at 3pm Mountain, 4pm Central and 5pm Eastern Time for one hour.

Participants will be provided an opportunity to hear from Dr. Lawrence, but more importantly will have an opportunity to ask questions.

VBA Tele-Town Hall: SOUTH DAKOTA



Benefits Update
Sept 10th | 3 MT | 4 CT | 5 ET

Agenda



- 1. Under Secretary Remarks on the State of VBA including COVID19 Changes (5-10 min)
- 2. Answer Veterans' Questions (45 min or more)

How to Join

- 1. Dial 833-380-0417
 - (suggested 10 min before)
- Listen in on the VBA updates
 Ask questions during the call

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sep 5—DAV/727 Poker Run—Swiftel Center—Brookings

Sep 7—State Offices Closed

Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)

Sep 18—POW/MIA Day Ceremony—Veterans Memorial Park—Sioux Falls—6:30 pm (CT)

Oct 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Sioux Falls

Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Dec 1—Governor's State of the Budget Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 12—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military https://military.sd.gov/default.html South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs https://vetaffairs.sd.gov

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